IGLESIA EPISCOPAL DE
GUATEMALA
APARTADO 58-A GUATEMALA, C. A. CABLE: EPICAM TELS: 720764-720852

RVDMO. ARMANDO R. GUERRA D. D.
OBISPO

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

The earliest Anglican presence in Guatemala can be traced to an English-speaking chaplaincy staffed by British clergymen attached to the British Legation in 1867. Over the years, a permanent English-speaking congregation grew, developed, and continues today as the St. James congregation of the Cathedral in Guatemala City.

The expansion of the Church into the Spanish-speaking work, and its subsequent growth and extension into various parts of the country, began in 1957, when the Guatemalan Church was transferred from the Anglican Church of the West Indies to the jurisdiction of the Episcopal Church of the United States. In 1961, the Rev. Adrián Cáceres, present bishop of Ecuador, began work with the Guatemalans, out of which has growth a strong group that now makes up the Spanish-speaking congregation of the Cathedral. Many of these first Guatemalan Episcopalians were responsible for the establishment of other missions throughout the city, and most of these missions are growing actively in membership and also in the range of ministry they provide in their respective communities.

The Episcopal schools are now in operation, and important emphasis has been directed to medical and dental clinics, of which the Church had sponsored four, as a mean of service and outreach to the people.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to the Church to respond to people's needs came in February 1976 with the earthquake that claimed thousands of lives and left over one million people homeless. The Church responded with the coordination of immediate relief effort in the form of food, clothing, and medicine, and also in the longer-term reconstruction of houses. In the post-earthquake period, the Episcopal Church was able to build some 1,100 new living units in addition to several other structures, including new churches.

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The most recent thrust in the decade of the 80's was in the area of El Quiché, and the southern part of the Country. In the first, with the help of a translator and local lay leadership, three new missions have been established: La Transfiguración in Chumanzana, San Matías in Chugüexá, and San Juan Apóstol in Chichicastenango. With the help of a UTO grant, a church complex has been started in the first-mentioned place. New indigenous missions have also been established in the department of Izabal, Santa Cruz in Guapinol, San Andrés in Chapín, and San Pedro in Esmeralda. In the second, through the efforts of very commited Seminarians, new Congregations have been established, Santa María, Santa Martha, La Epifanía, and La Ascención, all them located in Escuintla and Suchitepeguez.

From one foreign priest in 1957, the Guatemalan Church has grown over the years to 24 clergymen (of whom all but two are nationals) plus 12 lay ministers. In 1992, there were a total of 34 sites of Episcopal presence throughout the country. Baptized members are approximately 5,000 with about 3,000 members in good standing.

The Diocese has two Theological Seminaries, Santo Tomás Apóstol that prepares vocations according to the regular standard and qualifications, and the Mayan Seminary that prepares Ministers to serve with the Mayan Congregations.

From a foreign Bishop of Central America in the 1950s, the Guatemalan Church came into its own under the leadership of its first bishop, the Rt. Rev. William C. Frey, from 1967 to 1972. The Rt. Rev. Anselmo Carral served as Guatemala's second bishop from 1973 to 1981; and since early 1982 the Church of Guatemala now has its first national bishop, the Rt. Rev. Armando Guerra, who brings to this position a dynamic, youthful spiritual leader to guide this Church in its evolution as part of the larger Church.

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PRESENT EFFORTS

In 1984 the work of the Diocese was reestructurated into five (5) regions, of which we are presently working in four (4): Center, Northeast, West, and South.

The Central Region is comprised of the following congregations: San Mateo, Morales; San Miguel y Todos los Angeles, Bananera; San Timoteo, Virginia; San José, Campo II; San Miguel Arcángel, Campo III; San Esteban, Mariscos; Santa Cruz, Guapinol; Santa Trinidad, Cocales; San Felipe, San Felipe de Lara; San Antonio, Sejá; San Bernabé, Fronteras; San Pablo, Puerto Barrios; Todos los Santos in Gualán, Zacapa; San Pedro, La Esmeralda; Santa Isabel, La Bacadilla; and San Andrés, El Chapín.

In this region there are two agricultural projects devoted primarily to the cultivation of rubber: Project LIFE in Mariscos and Project Florida in Sejá.

The Western Region is comprised of the following congregations: San Marcos, Quezaltenango; San Juan Apóstol, Chichicastenango; La Transfiguración, Chumanzana; San Matías, Chugüexá; San Bartolomé, Chucalibal. With the exception of the congregation of San Marcos, all these congregations are indigenous, and services are held in the Maya-Quiché dialect.

In the Southern Region there are the following congregations: Santa María, Escuintla; La Anunciación, Santa Lucía; Santa Martha and Epifanía in Mazatenango.

The regionalization of the Diocese has opened new perspectives in mission, inasmuch as it permits us to respond more immediately, and more directly, to the development needs of the different regions.

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Perhaps the most important accomplishment in recent months has been the Pastoral Plan for the next 10 years, presented by the leadership to the XXV Diocesan Convention in May, 1991. Although these plans still require revision and changes, they already constitute the guidelines that are been follow now and will be in the years to come.

December 1992